

666

the antichrist's

almanac

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Lest we forget Pope Pius XII
Catholic Church (WLD)

In Israel on March 23, 2000 John Paul II deplored the "terrible tragedy" of the Holocaust in a speech at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Coinciding with John Paul's visit, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial published *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, a 271-page collection of essays and documents.

The cover photo shows high-ranking German Catholic clergymen giving the Nazi salute, the right arm stretched out, as they stand next to Nazi propaganda chief Josef Goebbels.

In a chapter on Pius XII (1939-58), historian Michael R Marrus wrote that as fascism spread across Europe, the Catholic Church remained aloof and rarely spoke out against the persecution of Jews ...

Five months earlier, on November 11, 1999, the *Herald Sun's* Graeme Hammond reviewed a biography of Pius XII by English journalist, John Cornwell.

"He was one of the Vatican's most influential players," Hammond said in his review of Cornwell's book, *Hitler's Pope*.

"But his lust for power led him into a dreadful pact with Adolf Hitler ..."

It was a day the Catholic Church would rather forget. The setting was hallowed St Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin and the rousing service that September day in 1933 would become pivotal to the fate of millions of European Jews.

It was no ordinary service.

High above the head of papal nuncio Cesare Orsenigo, who led the service, Nazi flags hung with traditional Catholic banners. In the pews, military tunics and jackboots were as plentiful as clerical cassocks.

And, as the service concluded, the congregation rose to join voices in the *Horst Wessel Song*, the anthem of the National Socialists. The words boomed out over loudspeakers to the thousands outside.

Any public doubt the Nazi regime had the blessing of the Holy See evaporated. The service marked the ratification of a historic concordat between the Vatican and the German Government that both claimed would herald a new era of peace and understanding between church and state.

The signing of the concordat was the culmination of an exhausting 19-year effort by one of the most powerful men in the Vatican, Cardinal Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli. In the final negotiations, he had dealt personally with the state's most potent political figure, Chancellor Adolf Hitler.

For Pacelli, whose grandeur would swell manifold within six short years when he was crowned as Pope Pius XII, the deal

was a triumph.

Yet, already, Pacelli was having misgivings. A month earlier - the deal having been initialled by him and Hitler- he had told a visiting British diplomat he was dragged reluctantly into the agreement. A pistol, he had complained, was pointed at his head and he had no alternative.

The Reich concordat was something the Catholic Church would live to regret. Even today, it struggles to explain why the Vicar of Christ would pursue an extraordinary agreement that would aid Hitler's rise to power, then buy the silence not only of the Pope, but of Germany's 23 million Catholics as the church watched a sickening parade of Nazi and fascist atrocities during World War II.

Award-winning English journalist John Cornwell was one of many Catholics who felt history harshly treated Pius XII, the most intriguing of the 20th century pontiffs.

Several years ago, Cornwell, a former seminarian, began researching the life of Pacelli for what he sincerely assured the keepers of the Vatican's archives would be a sympathetic biography. He was given unprecedented access to long-secret documents.

But, in 1997, as he neared the end of his research, Cornwell was in a state of moral shock. "The material I had gathered amounted not to an exoneration, but to a wider indictment," he writes in *Hitler's Pope*, the book that resulted.

"Spanning Pacelli's career from the beginning of the century, my research told the story of a bid for unprecedented papal power that by 1933 had drawn the Catholic Church into complicity with the darkest forces of the era.

"I found evidence, moreover, that from an early stage in his career Pacelli betrayed an undeniable antipathy towards the

Jews, and that his diplomacy in Germany in the 1930s had resulted in the betrayal of Catholic political associations that might have challenged Hitler's regime and thwarted the Final Solution."

The publication of *Hitler's Pope* - released to critical and scholarly acclaim in Britain, Europe and the US in September, and to be published in Australia this week - has provoked a withering attack from the church.

High-ranking bureaucrats have tried to torpedo the book with legal threats over Cornwell's permission to use the Vatican documents.

Pacelli, Cornwell claims, was the ideal Pope for Hitler's unspeakable plan. He was the Fuhrer's pawn.

Pacelli was born in March 1876 to a Roman family steeped in Catholic tradition. A physically delicate but intellectually precocious child, he heard the calling to the priesthood early, was ordained at 23, in the Vatican by 25 and lecturing in canon law by 27.

In 1904, Pacelli embarked on a 14-year task of writing a Catholic legal manual that came to be known as the 1917 Code of Canon Law; a creation of order among a centuries-old collection of hundreds of decrees, rules and regulations.

More than that, it was the formulation of greater power for future popes - the creation of a new "top-down" power relationship that would leave the pontiff in a position of complete and supreme jurisdiction over the Church and its bishops.

The desire for law, order and papal power burned strongly in Pacelli. By June 1914, he had negotiated and sealed a historic concordat between the Holy See and the government

of Serbia.

It gave teeth to the new Code of Canon Law and allowed the church to impose the code on Serbia's Catholic clergy and subjects. The Pope would have sole power to nominate new bishops, ousting governments from the decision-making.

It was a model that greatly benefited the Vatican and one that Pacelli endeavoured to extend throughout Europe. His successes continued: first Bavaria, then Prussia, then a sweeping treaty with Italy in which dictator Benito Mussolini also acknowledged Catholicism as the sole recognised religion in the country and awarded sovereignty over the Vatican City.

But as he rose through the ranks to archbishop, then a papal ambassador to the Reich in Berlin and finally Cardinal Secretary of State, Pacelli set his sights on a greater prize - a concordat with the Reich government.

For its own reasons, the Reich had been keen for a concordat since 1921. In its bitter territorial dispute with Poland to the east, a papal endorsement would be very handy indeed.

By 1931, leading German Catholics, priests and the Catholic press were sounding dire warnings of the brutality and explicit racism of the National Socialists. Pacelli held a different view: to him, any party that declared open war on socialism and communism, both hostile towards the church, would be a friend worth keeping.

So convinced was he that Hitler would be good for the church and Germany, that in August 1931 Pacelli began applying pressure on Chancellor Heinrich Brüning - head of the Catholic Centre Party, the powerbrokers in the coalition government - to draw the Nazis and Hitler into his minority government.

Pacelli's motives were clear: Hitler's presence in the government would boost his chances of signing a Reich concordat.

Bruning was appalled. The system of concordats he later wrote led Pacelli and the Vatican "to despise democracy and the parliamentary system. Rigid governments, rigid centralisation, and rigid treaties were supposed to introduce an era of stable order, an era of peace and quiet."

Meanwhile, Germany was coming apart at the seams. With unemployment soaring and the economy on the brink of collapse a trail of elections - five in 1932 alone - pushed the National Socialists closer to power.

In January 1933, Hitler was sworn in as chancellor and by March he had cobbled together an alliance that would give the Nazis a wafer-thin majority in the Reichstag.

In his path to European dominance, however, stood the Catholic Centre Party, rock solid with 14 per cent of the vote and with 23 million faithful behind them, steadfast in their condemnation of National Socialism.

What Hitler needed was a tactic to neutralise their opposition - and unwittingly Pacelli and his precious concordat began to be drawn into his web.

Hitler was only too glad to grant the Catholic Church religious freedoms - but at a price: the withdrawal of the church from all social and political action, and there was another condition.

To sign the concordat, Hitler would require the powers of a dictator to override the strong antireligious views within the Reichstag. Those powers could only be vested in him with the passage of the Enabling Act - and for that he needed the support of the Centre Party.

With Ludwig Kaas, a Catholic priest and member of the Centre Party as a go-between, Pacelli began lobbying the party to back the Enabling Act.

Bruning was outraged, declaring the Act the "most monstrous resolution ever demanded of a parliament". Few shared his view. On March 23, the Act was passed with the support of the Centre Party. Hitler now had the power to pass laws without the consent of the Reichstag and to make treaties with foreign governments.

The first of those was with the Vatican.

Hitler wasted no time in flexing his new political muscle. Within nine days, the national boycott of Jewish businesses had begun. Public beatings of Jews by gangs of brownshirts already were under way. Neither ailing Pius XI nor Pacelli - already hard at work with party leader Franz von Papen scribbling out a draft concordat - uttered a word of condemnation.

And Cardinal Faulhaber, of Munich, declined to make public comment on the mounting Nazi attacks against Germany's Jews. "Jews," he told Pacelli, "can help themselves."

Hitler began increasing the pressure on Pacelli.

In May, von Papen told Pacelli the Fuehrer was demanding that *all* political activity by the Catholic clergy be categorically forbidden.

Two weeks later a conference of bishops endorsed the changes. Impassioned pleas from some delegates that the church was sailing into danger were ignored.

On June 3, a pastoral message was published by Archbishop Grober, announcing the end of the Catholic hierarchy's opposition to the Nazi regime.

Their satisfaction was short-lived: within days, a campaign of terror was launched against Centre Party deputies and members, a month of house searches, arrests, beatings, intimidation and thousands were jailed. A rally of Catholic apprentices was attacked by Nazi-uniformed thugs. Pacelli responded by pressuring the Centre Party to disband.

On July 4, the party was dissolved. The bishops' apparent approval of a one-party state drove more and more Catholics to the bosom of National Socialism.

Heinrich Bruning gave a chilling assessment of Pacelli's outlook. The cardinal, he said, "visualised an authoritarian state and an authoritarian church directed by Vatican bureaucracy, the two to conclude an eternal league with one another."

As concordat negotiations reached a climax, Hitler's demands intensified. Only those Catholic organisations characterised as purely religious, cultural and charitable could remain. All others must disband or merge with Nazi associations. Again Pacelli acquiesced.

On July 8, 1933, the two sides came together in the Vatican to sign the document.

Newspapers carried banner headlines of the concordat, as Hitler declared German priests "will from now on put themselves without reservation at the service of the National Socialist state".

Whether Pacelli had by now begun to rue the treaty is unknown, but Hitler was exultant: six days later he told a Cabinet meeting the concordat had created an atmosphere of confidence that would be "especially significant in the urgent struggle against international Jewry".

That same meeting adopted the Law for Prevention of

Genetically Diseased Offspring, a law that called for the sterilisation of those suffering from hereditary diseases including blindness and deafness. It would result in the forced sterilisation of about 320,000 patients.

Under the terms of the concordat the Catholic Church could say nothing.

Within weeks there were more laws. Jewish students were forced from German schools. Thousands of priests across Germany began to comply with new anti-Semitic laws, supplying the Reich with details of blood purity and baptism registries that would distinguish Jews from non-Jews.

Only in October, with the Catholic press all but shut down, did the Pope begin to stir. Through Pacelli, he warned the German ambassador to the Holy See that he would issue a public protest unless outrages against Catholics ceased. The Vatican, Pacelli privately told Berlin, was prepared to acknowledge Hitler's Reich, whatever its offences against human rights, provided the Catholic Church in Germany was left in peace.

When, in 1937, the patience of German bishops was finally exhausted, Pius XI - by now ill with diabetes, heart disease and ulceration of the legs - resolved to issue an encyclical on the plight of the German church.

Drafted by Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich and edited by Pacelli, the encyclical despaired over the actions of the Nazis, yet failed to condemn them or Hitler by name.

Even Kristallnacht - the orgy of violence in November 1938 that sparked the destruction and vandalism of synagogues and Jewish businesses, the murder of 800 Jews and the deportation of 26,000 to concentration camps - failed to draw a clear word of criticism from the Vatican.

An encyclical was commissioned by the Pope in June. It suffered numerous drafts and rewrites in the end doing little more than blaming the Jews for their own fate. It was delivered to Pius days before the death. It was never published.

It took three ballots to elect Pacelli as the next Pope in March 1939. It had never been in doubt: Pius XI had been grooming his successor for years. Nor was there a trace of suspicion that Pacelli, once crowned, would alter the papal stance. It was he who had dictated the Vatican's stance all along.

He said nothing at a 1941 audience with Croatian dictator Ante Pavelic to condemn his murderous campaign that would end in the deaths of 487,000 Orthodox Serbs, 30,000 Jews and 27,000 Gypsies. Many were tortured. Some were skinned alive.

In June 1942, when London's *Daily Telegraph* revealed one million Jews had been exterminated in Europe in a bid "to wipe the race from the European continent", Pacelli kept silent.

He was no more inclined that summer to denounce the Nazis when the deportation of 15,000 Dutch Jews began. Such a statement would have revealed to Jews and Christians alike that deportation to the East was simply a train ride to the death camps.

Nor, in October 1943, when hundreds of SS police rounded up a thousand Jewish men, women and children, herded them on to trucks and drove them past St Peter's Square on their way to a grisly death by gassing, did Pacelli utter a word of disapproval.

And he feared intervention would draw the church into an alliance with forces - chiefly the Soviet Union - whose

ultimate aim was to destroy the church.

"That failure to utter a candid word about the Final Solution in progress proclaimed to the world that the Vicar of Christ was not moved to pity and anger," Cornwell writes.

Last month, Vatican officials told the World Jewish Congress that it was slowing the process towards sainthood for Pacelli.

Even this is a travesty to Cornwell, who says Pacelli was "the very antithesis of the saintly model he was said to be, a deeply flawed human being from whom Catholics, and our relations with other religions, can best profit by expressing our sincere regret ...".

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*"Civilisation will not attain to its perfection
until the last stone from the last church
falls on the last priest"*

(Emile Zola)

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